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**Klara Gottesman Klein,  
A Sole Survivor**

PII Redacted

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## Klara Gottesman Klein, A Sole Survivor: My Mother's Memoirs As Related To Rosalyn Klein

July 29, 1988

Klara Gottesman Klein resides with her husband, Steve Klein in N. Hollywood CA.

*I began wondering, from a very young age, why I had no grandparents — why my parents were sometimes sad and silent, yet still so bold and proud to be Jews. Now, almost 50 years after the holocaust's early tremors on this earth, my mother at long last dictated to me her memories of those days of Shoah. After years of painful silence, a period silenced by pain too great, and in an effort to shield her children, my mother finally shared her story with me. We as children never dared to ask for details, fearing to increase the pain. I transcribed, silently, from a familiar story that I had pieced together long ago. This story, however, I had never before heard aloud. Today, my mother had dictated, aloud to me her experiences. These are her words, and this is her testimony:*

Rosalyn Klein

My home town was located on the geographical border area which divided "Ushhorod" (which later became "Ungvar") and "Mukacevo" (or later "Munkach"), in Czechoslovakia, called Seredne. I don't recall what the population of my hometown was: I don't even know how many Jews lived there, but I knew, personally, about 100 Jewish families. They were all large families with many children. The town had a railroad line and station, a bus line, and a few taxis which connected us to the big cities. The non-Jewish population were mostly peasants and landowners. Most of the Jews were businessmen, store owners, tailors, shoemakers, electricians, and tradespeople.

Most of the Jews lived on the main street where the businesses were. The business faced the street and the living quarters were in the back. Some had nice flower and vegetable gardens, and even fruit trees. There was a post office, two banks, two candy stores, schools, an ice cream parlor, a movie theatre, two Jewish bakeries, two high schools (the Russian High School sat on the top of a hill). There was also a police station, a city hall, two churches — one Roman Catholic and one Greek Orthodox. Of

course, there was our synagogue the only two-story building surrounded by the buildings of the Bet HaMidrash, Cheder, and ritual bath.

There was even a large castle which dated back to the Franz-Josef, Austria-Hungary period. The rumors were that Maria-Teresia owned it, but by my time it was already in ruins. We also had a Yeshiva, where the older boys studied. Our town was famous for its good wine. We had two dentists, two doctors, a flour mill and a brewery. There was a football team, two bowling alleys, three taverns, and a restaurant where Jewish weddings were held. The gentiles held their balls in this Jewish restaurant as well.

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We lived in a big house, (big for this town) in the heart of the main street which was called "Masarykova Ulice." Our house originally belonged to my grandparents. Since my mother was the youngest in the family, she inherited the house and my grandparents lived with us. This was usually the custom then.

My grandparents owned a yardage and dry goods store. My mother worked with them, in the store since she was 14, as her five brothers were in the army. Since it was during World War I, help was impossible to find. When my mother married, after World War I, my father expanded the store and the house. He also opened a bank and, over the years, acquired lots of land — among them vineyards, a winery and a wine cellar.

My parents and grandparents were very busy people. Their lives were devoted to their business and helping others. My father became the Rosh Hakahal (president) of our synagogue and the peasants called him, "Pan (Sir) Fiskaros (Lawyer).

\* \* \*

I was the second child, born prematurely, and the doctor told my parents that I would not survive. My mother wasn't in very good shape either, and was told not to get attached to me. She was unable to breast feed me, so my parents hired a gentile woman who had

given birth at the same time and was willing to move into our house and take charge of my care. I refused to give up. My mother couldn't come near me, but with the help of this woman and others in the household, I pulled through. I was called; "the miracle baby."

When it was time for me to go to kindergarten, I was enrolled in the only kindergarten in the town which was run by Catholic nuns (and we had to pay tuition). My mother had attended that very same school. However, in first grade, I attended a different school, a Czech school, where my older brother had gone earlier. The enrollment was 90 percent Jewish.

We had excellent Czech teachers. When I finished the fifth grade, I was enrolled in the Czech High School. My brother had also been in attendance in this school where he learned French and German. In addition, before school and afterwards, he also attended Cheder. Girls went to Hebrew School, but only during the summer vacations. There we learned to read and write Hebrew and studied some Jewish History.

The last summer before 1938, my father went to Bratislava, where he had attended Yeshivas as a young man, and hired a very nice Hebrew school teacher. She was a "girl" and very beautiful. I admired her and learned more from her than any other previous teacher. I thought life was great in those days, and, by then, I had three younger sisters.

I was introduced to Zionism very early in my life by an older, male cousin who was employed in our store. He took me to the Betar every week when I was as young as five or six years old. I still wonder whether it was with the approval of my parents. There I learned the "HaTikvah" and other Betar songs. Our community had other Zionist organizations as well, such as Mizrachi and Agudat Israel.

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All of a sudden, I became aware that there were things going on in the world which I couldn't understand. Family and friends, neighbors, got together in our house and talked politics. My parents were subscribers to a Hungarian newspaper called Kassai Ujshag and my brother read a Czech paper called Azet.

Even though I spoke Hungarian, I didn't know how to read or write, because I had attended Czech schools. So when I tried to read the paper — it didn't make much sense. My parents and relatives and friends spent more and



more time listening to the BBC broadcasts. More and more people asked to borrow the Hungarian newspaper. They came over to listen to the BBC; not too many people had radios.

Early one morning, I heard a lot of commotion in the house. My father had not gone to the early morning services, and he wasn't even dressed. He had his trousers on over his pajamas. I had never seen him like this before. Everyone in the household was very sad. I went to our maid to find out what was going on and she told me not to worry.

Later that day, I visited my non-Jewish friend, Marta. Her father was Chief of Police; she told me that they were packing and leaving for Prague. Soon we saw more and more Czechs leaving, including some of my teachers. There was a lot of confusion and chaos. The businesses were closed; finally, the school was closed and food became hard to find.

Our town became occupied by local Ukrainians, *Sichaks*. Things became even more confused; everything was blamed on the Jews. My father was arrested for not posting a flag when the local Ukrainians took over. We didn't even know what their colors were ... When we found out that it was yellow (I think), my mother got the material from our store and made a flag right away. Then they (the Ukrainians) complained that it was too small for our house. My mother then made a bigger flag, but still, they wouldn't release my father. It was only after we paid a big ransom that they let him go. From then on, it was hell for all Jews.

Luckily, the Ukrainian occupation lasted only six months. We were "liberated" by the Hungarian Army on a very cold, rainy day. The Hungarians stopped in front of our house. We all watched from our window as my father went out to greet them and sang the Hungarian anthem with them. This shocked me, to no end. I felt very sad; couldn't believe my father would do this. The Hungarian police soon arrived with their hats with funny black rooster feathers. They asked for assistance as were very poorly supplied. We helped them out with everything. My father showed them around, pointing out the government buildings to them.

In our bank, two huge pictures of our first, beloved president, Tomas Garyk Masaryk were taken down. All the ribbons of the Czech flag and the Czech flags and picture of our second president, Eduard Benes, were removed as

well. When the schools reopened, they were under Hungarian administration; but in the high school, there were not many students, because very few gentiles spoke Hungarian, and the Jewish families, by then, could not afford to pay for schooling. The students went back to grade school, which was free

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With the Hungarians came the "Jewish Question." New laws against the Jews were posted daily. The government became more and more anti-Semitic. First, a Jew could not work for the government; then a Jew could not get a license for anything. Then, they closed and confiscated all Jewish businesses. Everything was rationed. Finally, they took all the able men to forced-labor; male teenagers were forced to go to *Levente*, a training camp.

I somehow finished the second year of high school, but when I wanted to register for the third year, they closed the school for a lack of students wishing to attend a Hungarian school. I was forced to register in the Russian high school, even though I knew very little Russian; I could not even read or write Russian. By then, a new law was passed that Jews could not even attend high school. With much persuasion, they finally permitted three Jews (girls only) to attend, and I was one of them.

My older brother and younger sister went to a private school in Ungvar, 20 kilometers away. For this, they did not even get scholastic credit. I didn't like the Russian school, even though it was a very nice, two-story building. I was forced to go to school on Saturdays, though I did refrain from writing. Saturdays, on the way to school, I would meet Jewish people on their way to synagogue, and it was very embarrassing to me.

\*Anti-Semitism was growing stronger and stronger. In school, I was forced to listen for hours to Hitler's anti-Semitic speeches given almost daily (even though most of the students in school couldn't even understand German). I however was able to understand as I spoke Yiddish and had taken German in the Czech schools. On the street, kids shouted at me, "Dirty Jews, go to Palestine!" One day, I came home and only our maid was there. I told her how upset I was, and she told me that all this was happening because we Jews had killed their "Christ." She pulled out her prayer book and showed me her pictures of the crucifixion. I was shocked and ashamed

at this, my first confrontation with the issue. I still can't forgive my parents and Jewish teachers for not discussing this subject with me and "arming" us with a defense.

More and more Hungarian officials moved into our town and occupied our store and bank. Slowly, they moved into our living quarters, too, and without any compensation...

In 1940, my mother gave birth to another little girl. This was my fourth younger sister. We were now six children, all living in very cramped quarters. I somehow managed to finish the fourth year of high school, and as a Jew, I was not allowed to continue further (there were eight years of high school). All my friends went to learn a trade from a fellow-Jew in town. My brother and younger sister were still going to private school in Ungvar. My brother had a paid membership at the library there, so he used to bring home lots of books. I occupied myself with reading. My father became a full-time farmer and we lived on the wine that we sold to the wholesalers. We grew everything that we needed for the household and shared with the less fortunate.

In 1942, the Jews needed papers to prove that their ancestors did indeed live in this part of the world. Otherwise, they were shipped to Poland, and we never heard of them again. My father became very active in securing papers for others who could not afford to do it for themselves. The authorities were aware of this and one day, while my father was away, they came to our house and arrested us. We were moved to the jail, and were about to be shipped out; then my father returned and we were released. When we came back to our home, our property had been looted. All the fruit had been picked off the trees, the garden destroyed, and windows broken. This happened in the month of Av.

Later on, they arrested my father and he was sent to a labor camp at the other end of the country. For weeks we didn't know where he was. Finally, after being sent to three different camps, he found himself in "Nagy Kanisha," far away. He worked there as a gardener. My mother could visit him only once or twice in many months. Suddenly, my father was released. He hardly had time to recover from the terrible ordeal, when he was summoned to the authorities and asked to establish a factory to produce wooden crates and barrels for the government. These were to be used to send fruit and



vegetables to the front to the fighting soldiers. This turn of events shocked us all. My father explained to the authorities that one needed a license to establish such a factory. At first, they insisted that he could do it without a license, but my father still insisted. To our surprise, the license was granted.

From then on, we hardly ever saw our father; even my older brother became very active in the operation. Business was booming, and even though we were not supposed to hire Jews, my father and brother delivered material and supplies late at night to almost every Jewish family (they would nail the crates together). In this way, many Jewish families became a part of a factory — windows and doors were, of course, closed.

The only time I saw my father was on Shabbos. Friday night we had dinner together. Saturday morning, he went to the *mikvah* (ritual bath), then on to the morning Shabbos services. After lunch, my parents usually took a short nap. Afterwards, my father went to test the yeshiva students. I distinctly remember him saying, "Well, it's time to go *'cim aushem*.'" This process was to check on what the yeshiva boys were really learning. After *Haudalah*, my father and brother went to pick up the crates from the Jewish families. This was the best time, because the gentile families were in their taverns enjoying themselves.

\* Anti-Semitism was rampant. Ugly slogans, lies, were painted on signs everywhere. My brother used to sneak out during the night and tear them down. Luckily, he was never caught. The main agitation came from the churches. On Sunday, a Jew didn't dare to go out on the street, and on Sunday nights, the gentiles took to breaking the windows of Jewish homes and synagogues. "Crystal Night" had come to our town. When it became unbearable, we organized a vigilante group; the headquarters were in our kitchen. Every vigilante was able to come in from the cold once every hour to warm up and get a cup of hot tea. They were armed with sticks only, but the window-breaking stopped. What a "victory" that was.

My family had kept in touch with my father's uncle in New York. He encouraged us to come to America, and he sent affidavits, but the quota had already been filled. Thus, our uncle suggested that my brother come on a student visa to Yeshiva University (my father's uncle was one of the founders). This grand-un-

cle's name was Mendel Gottesman. Although the student visa was granted, we couldn't obtain a passport, but my brother feverishly studied English anyway.

In February 1944, there was a knock on our door around midnight. When the door was opened, there stood four SS men. I don't know what their demand was, but my mother made them scrambled eggs and served them wine. My father came in and woke me and my brother and told us to get dressed in a hurry. He opened the window of my parent's bedroom and told us to jump out and run towards the creek and hide. It was a very high window, and it was a miracle that we didn't break our necks. We ran, but couldn't find a place to hide. We wound up in nearby woods and sat there through the night. When daylight came, my brother noticed that we were in an old cemetery. He was very upset, because he was a *Kohen*. We then decided to go to the rabbi's home.

The rabbi's wife was very happy to see us, gave us water to wash, and made us breakfast. Later, my brother went home and came back to tell me that I must stay with the rabbi's family. Days later, I was picked up and sent to a nearby village to a farming family. Their barn became my home. I slept on a bale of hay in the barn, with cows and horses, no electricity or water.

Late at night, I came out to stretch my legs and eat. The barn was constantly dark, only a tiny bit of light came in through the cracks. I always slept in my clothes; I couldn't even read. Messages from my parents assured me that the war was going badly for the Germans and, by Pesach, we would be liberated and I would be able to come home.

Days and weeks passed uneventfully. The farmer told me that now the Jews have to wear yellow-star patches and cannot go out after 7 p.m. On *erev* Pesach, I decided to go home without my parents' permission. I walked home and arrived after the *Seder* was over. My family was amazed, but happy to see me. One week later, we were ordered into the ghetto in Ungvar — into the brick factory.

First, we were gathered into the Russian High School where we were thoroughly searched, even our private parts. They asked where we had hid our jewelry and money. Earlier, I had hid my watch and gold ring under a ball of yarn. I had them in my pocket, but I didn't tell them.

When we marched from the school to the railroad station, our "good Christian" neighbors watched us as though it was a fun parade. I will never forget that feeling. It was April 20, 1944. My brother and I painted this date on our house on the outside wall with big numbers before we left.

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\*\* We were loaded into cattle cars with an open roof. It was a nice, sunny day and the trip didn't last long. We were wearing several outfits, one on top of the other, because we were allowed to bring only what we wore and what we could carry in our hands — food or blankets. When we arrived at our destination — the brick factory — there was no room for us inside the building, as it was packed with people. So we spent the night under the stars.

The next morning, my father and brother went to look around. They found a big pile of wood and building materials. We received permission to build barracks for ourselves. After it was finished, we moved in. We slept on the floor, as the only furniture we had was a small table which my father built. When more and more people arrived, having no place to stay, we invited them and their families to share our barracks. My father assumed charge of the arrangements in the barracks.

My two male cousins who had been discovered in hiding were sent to join us. We built a second floor and a ladder, so the four men slept upstairs. Circumstances in the ghetto were terrible. All around us, people were weak and dying of hunger and illness in the street. There were no doctors, or hospital, very little water. The latrine was horrible. After six weeks in that misery we were loaded into closed boxcars, without food or water. Like sardines in a can, we supported each other upright, enroute to an unknown destination.

In the ghetto, just before being loaded into the boxcars, an announcement was made that persons with visas or passports should step out. My father encouraged my brother to do so, but he refused. We didn't trust the Germans, and my brother said, "let's all stay together."

When the boxcar door opened, after a few days traveling, I think I was the first one to jump out. The air felt wonderful, but everything happened so fast that one



could not look back. I never saw my family again.

We were led to a big room where we were ordered to undress in front of the SS soldiers, and our heads were shaved. Then, we were marched to "C" Lager (camp) where, unable to quench my thirst, I just couldn't stop drinking water. It was only on the following day that I realized my younger sister was with me. Without our hair and dressed in the rags they had given us to wear, we had not recognized each other.

The "C" lager consisted of a long road with barracks lining both sides, surrounded with tall fences of high-voltage electric wires stretching as far as one could see. There was nothing but electrified wire and barracks — no trees, no grass, no flowers or any vegetation. Not even birds. Here, even the stars in the Heaven over us seemed further away from earth than at any place else.

Inside the barracks there was nothing but barren triple-tiered rough, unfinished wooden bunks. No mattresses, no sheets, no pillows and no covers. In each sleeping compartment, the 12 of us were squeezed together, like sardines. If one of us wanted to turn over to the other side, all 12 had to turn.

Each barracks accommodated between 800 to 1000 women. The men were in another lager (camp) somewhere nearby. During the daytime no one was allowed inside, regardless of whether it was very cold, very hot or if even raining.

Very early in the morning, while the stars were still out, we had to get up for *zahl-appel* (line-up), five in a row, in long straight lines, like "soldiers." This was done to take a count to be certain everyone was present. They counted and recounted, until they got the exact number that was supposed to be present, to make sure no one escaped, even though escape was impossible. They were high watch towers surrounding us and anyone attempting to get away from the designated area was shot dead on the spot. Secondly, anyone who came in contact with the live electric wire, was killed instantly, and there were instances of some inmates being electrocuted on the fences.

Each barracks had a woman — a "senior" inmate — who had already survived a few years of interment of the Polish Jews two or three years earlier

called *kapo*, she was "in charge" of the barracks, and gave us all orders and commands, that she in turn received from German supervisors.

The Jewish "kapo" or, as some called her, *block alterster*, meaning "older sister," was compensated for her "services" with special treatment and certain privileges. She received special food, separate living quarters (her own room in the barracks) and wore normal clothing, and was allowed to keep her hair. \*After the early morning *zahl-appel*, which sometimes lasted for hours, we received a dish of black coffee to be shared among five of us. Each of us had a sip. The coffee was full of chemicals that were to control our emotions, menstruation and break down our resistance. We also occasionally received a dry slice of "bread" which contained more saw-dust than flour. Sometimes the "bread" was given to us in one chunk and we had to divide it among the five of us without benefit of a knife. Most of the time, a fist-fight would break out among the five of us in trying to divide evenly that meager piece of so-called "bread."

The next meal, after the evening *zahl-appel*, consisted of a bowl of soup that looked and tasted like "dish water," with some potato peels thrown in, again one bowl shared among five people. Each one took a "gulp" until it was all consumed. We watched every gulp each one took — like hawks, so nobody would cheat. After that, we were permitted to go into our bunkbeds. We slept with our shoes on, because if we took them off, by the next morning they would be gone.

Our shoes were the only possession remaining to us that we brought from home. We had no underwear. The single dress that we had on our backs was old and usually many sizes too large for us. Even the dress was not to remain with us for long, because when we went for disinfection (delousing), we never got back the same dress. We had to wait outside naked, no matter what the weather, until we got "a dress" to put on.

One barracks served as a latrine. It had cold water, so we could wash our hands and face, but there was no soap, no tooth brush nor towels. The entire camp looked like an "insane asylum."

The most terrifying sight were the four crematories that surrounded us. Their flames reached to the sky and were kept burning day and night. Even though we could smell the human flesh burning, I kept saying to myself that they are burn-

ing only the things that they don't need, and some of our confiscated belongings. Or maybe they are burning some bodies of old people that died. Sometimes, the block *alterster* would threaten us, pointing at the chimneys saying that if we didn't behave she would send us up the chimney smoke.

We constantly wondered where the rest of our families were, the small children and all the men. More and more transports of Jews were arriving daily, non stop. I never met any gentiles among them. I really didn't know that there were so many Jews. Soon we got used to our surroundings.

The most horrifying moment was when Mengele called a special *zahl-appel* and started to select at random, individuals to fill his daily quota, to be sent either to the crematories or work. We were never sure what his needs were.

Sometimes, on uneventful days we would compose songs, poems and recipes, but we had no pencils or paper. We fantasized how, one day, when we got home, what we would cook and what we would eat and eat ... Later on we had no idea what day of the week or what month it was. We spend most of our time looking for relatives and friends.

The first day I arrived, I found my best friend with her younger sister and mother. They came to Auschwitz a few weeks earlier, because they were discovered in hiding, and for that their suffering started a few weeks earlier.

My friend and her younger sister were both very depressed and wouldn't even talk to me. Their mother suggested that she would come into my "block" and spend an evening *zahl-appel* with me, so that she could get my part of the "terrible soup" that I wouldn't or couldn't yet eat, anyway. It took a few days to get used to it and be able to swallow it. A week later they were gone and I never saw them again.

The person, I met was our former housekeeper, Fannie. This was a very happy day for me. But in a few days she too was gone. Then came my luckiest day yet. My sister and I met our six cousins — sisters, aged 13 to 26. We decided to stay with them in the same block. We lined up for *zahl appel* together, which made it simpler, because we made up almost two full rows, of five for each row. All we had to get was only two "strangers" to fill the two rows and divide the food.



Unfortunately, my sister soon developed a very bad diarrhea and we had to cover up for her through every *zahl* appel. We knew that we were going to lose her, but instead Mengele picked my oldest and youngest cousins to send to the ovens.

After a while, my sister miraculously recovered. But we were separated from our two remaining cousins. Mengele sent two of my cousins and my sister and me to a work transport with others, but we wound up in FKL Lager, across the street from our C-Lager. This lager was much smaller than the C-Lager, and in much worse condition. But I met two new cousins from my father's side, who were sisters, Gina and Blanca. Gina, whose husband was a doctor, would meet her husband at the electric fence once a week. When the armed guard wasn't looking, her husband threw food and clothing over the fence which they shared with us.

One day when my original shoes, the only possession that I had left of what I brought from home gave way, my doctor-cousin threw a pair of beautiful brand new leather shoes over the fence. They lasted me almost to the liberation. Unfortunately none of those cousins survived.

Later, we were sent back to the C-Lager, where we were miraculously united with our other cousins, so that the six of us were together again.

For the next six months, my sister and I were able to be together in Auschwitz; until one day, Mengele tore her out of my arms. I felt that he deliberately took her, because he noticed that we were sisters. \* The fall weather was very cold and we were shivering and suffering a lot. One day we heard some shooting and sirens. We were ordered into the barracks. We were filled with hope that we were being liberated. Instead, after a few hours of excitement and happiness, only one or two crematories were missing. They were blown up by some of our brave brothers, together with themselves.

The winter was arriving. The weather was turning very cold. The C-Lager was beginning to get emptier and emptier. With no clothes to protect us from the elements, we began suffering more and more from the cold weather. Finally our time came, and we were sent with about 500 women on a transport to Lansing, Austria — but unfortunately, without my sister Edith. We were given numbers (mine was 777), one cotton dress and a striped coat; no underwear. We arrived in Austria just before X-mas.

The snow was very deep. Everybody was assigned to a job. I was given the assignment of Holzplatz, a firewood production facility, which was producing fuel for trucks that used firewood for their wood burning engines. I had to chop the wood, put it into sacks and carry it to the trucks.

The German civilians stood there, watching us. It entertained them to see how I was struggling under the loads of wood, falling on my knees and face and struggling to get up. The load that I was carrying was bigger and heavier than I, most of the time. None of the bystanding Germans made any attempt to help me to get up.

The food was a little "better" and we had bunk beds with a "mattress" that was filled with newspaper, that we used for toilet paper and for wrapping our feet to keep them from freezing in the bitter cold of the Austrian winter. By the time we were liberated, there was no paper left.

The twice daily *zahl*-appel continued. We walked to work early mornings while it was still dark. By the time we got there, it was daylight. We had to cross railroad tracks. Approaching a railroad crossing, we had to rush to get through the crossing, before the train got there. One day, as we were racing against the speed of the train, five women didn't make it. The train ran through them and killed them instantly, without stopping.

Most of the inmates worked in factories and fortunately were not exposed to the cold and bad weather. But I was not so lucky; I worked outdoors and was exposed to the cold and rain. When the raw material that I worked with — in this case, sapwood — ran out, I was assigned all kinds of odd jobs. Sometimes I cleaned the streets, shoveling snow or covering bunkers where as we were told by SS guards, we would be put into, to be blown up and buried, when the Allied armies closed in. Statements of that nature gave us a clue that things were not going too well for the Germans.

One day, while I was pushing a wheelbarrow loaded with snow, a civilian German passing by threw a piece of bread into the wheel borrow. It seemed like manna dropping from Heaven.

In another episode, a civilian foreman took pity on me. He noticed that I had completely worn out my shoes and he brought me a pair of wooden shoes. I was very grateful for it, but I had a hard time getting used to walking in them. I didn't have enough paper left in my mat-

tress with which to line my shoes by then. Now I had to work outdoors all the time, no matter what the weather, even when it seemed like it was raining "cats and dogs." I became very discouraged and cried a lot. When my tears didn't freeze on my face, they ran into my mouth and they tasted very very salty ...

Finally, at long last, spring arrived, but I was growing weaker and weaker. One day we were told that we were not going to work, but we didn't get any food either. Then suddenly, most of the guards disappeared. This was the sign of liberation. I did not see the physical evidence of it. I only heard about it from other inmates, because I was too weak to get off my bunk.

I don't remember how it happened, but when I recovered, I found myself basking in the sun and breathing in dizzying fresh air and feeling as though I were being reborn ... We were left to ourselves. No guards, no food, but free. We were extremely hungry. We looked around and saw, in the not too far distance, some scattered farm houses. We used most of our energy to get to one of the farm houses to look for food.

My cousins and I went into a house filled with civilian Germans. They were having their meal. The table was surrounded with men and women. The table was loaded with all kinds of food. Bread, cheese, butter, milk and fruit in great variety. The sight of that abundance of food almost took our breath away!!

We begged for food, but the Germans mercilessly chased us out of their house. So we struggled to make our way back to the camp. It was from the camp in Lansing, Austria, where I was finally liberated by the Americans on May 5, 1945. I weighed less than 50 pounds.

When we got back to the camp, we saw that suddenly there was plenty of food. The Allied Armed Forces discovered our camp, even though it was out of the way of the main thrust of the liberating armies. There was actually too much food and we had no energy to eat. Most of us got sick from the sudden stress to our digestive systems.

Finally there were all kinds of officials interviewing us, asking questions as to where we would want to go from there — to Sweden, England, etc. — or if we wished to return home to Czechoslovakia. My cousins and I chose to be sent back to Czechoslovakia. But one of my cousins, who was gravely ill, was trans-



ported to a hospital in Sweden, where she later died.

Before we were able to go anywhere, the Liberation Army told us that we needed to first recover and get well. We were taken to Scherfling, to a beautiful, quiet lakeside, where the Nazis used to

vacation under the Hitler regime. There we got good medical and nursing care, and good food.

It took us two months to recover in preparation for our trip home to Czechoslovakia. When we arrived in Prague

we were welcomed like heroes and showered with flowers.

*This is my legacy to my family. I am the only survivor of my family, from a town in eastern Europe.*

Klara Klein  
nee' Leah Gottesman



In my previous description, I described an abbreviated version of my life and family history. This part of my story, I hope to deal with events of my life after the survival of the holocaust.

About a month after my liberation from our worst nightmare of the "holocaust," we were told that soon a bus from Prague, the capital city of Czechoslovakia, will come and take us home to Czechoslovakia. We all became very excited and unbelievably happy. Soon there were Czech flags flying all over the camp. Some girls made them by hand—I don't know where they got the material for the flags. Girls from other countries were envying us. We sang songs in every language and danced the "Hora." Food was plentiful. The Red Cross posted the names of other liberated camps and their survivors. Each time there was a name of a sister or brother or a friend on the list, we celebrated and that gave us more hope. Survivors who needed medical help were taken to nearby hospitals. It was amazing how fast we became "normal" even though we were far from "civilization." Our Hair grew back fast. We all received one "normal" dress. The weather was nice and warm and we could not wait to leave the camp. Even though the Red Cross didn't post any name of my family, I didn't give up hope.

Finally, the day came when we were on the way to Prague. It was hard to say good-bye to the rest of the survivors. My heart was beating very fast, when we crossed the border and arrived at the Czech soil. We were welcomed with open arms. The Czech people were wonderful. They came out of their houses with food and flowers.

My three cousins and I were placed by the Czech officials in a sanatorium, where we received wonderful care. Our room was beautiful, with separate <sup>beds</sup> and white sheets and a bathroom. We thought that we were in heaven. Everybody was so kind and helpful. Later, we received free passes for transportation, free movie and theatre tickets, but we only wanted to find family members. For weeks, we went to the railroad and bus stations, where refugees were arriving daily, but with no success. We heard that in Budapest there were lots of refugees. One day we decided foolishly to leave for Budapest, where nobody was waiting for us, and we barely made it there. The trains were so crowded, there was standing room only—but the trains were free.

The territory was under Russian occupation and their soldiers were very rude and mean. They stole everything they could from us. In Budapest, we slept on the floor in a school building. There was hardly any food. We repeatedly went to the railroad station with no success, and we ate in the "soup kitchen" one meal per day.

One day my older cousin found out that her brother was alive and very sick in our hometown. She decided to go to see for herself. When she didn't return, we decided to go to find her. There was no mail or telephone service in those days. We finally made it there without any money or food the hard way.

I didn't recognize my hometown. It was so depressing, dirty and neglected. The stores were closed and empty. I passed our house, but could not enter. It was occupied and unrecognizable—they wouldn't let me in. We went to my Uncle's house, where we found our cousins.



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The house didn't have any doors or windows, everything had been dismantled and stolen. Once a beautiful house, it was in shambles. The house had no furniture, so we slept on the floor. A friend of my cousins found out about us and came running to meet us. He said we could not stay in this house, because it was too dangerous. He found another place for us to sleep with a Christian family. Their house was previously owned by a Jewish family, who never returned and died in the Holocaust.

We ate at a soup kitchen, where we had to volunteer in order to get food. They didn't like me there, because I was too slow and inexperienced. One day my cousins and I decided to go into one of our vineyards to get grapes, but we almost lost our lives. The caretaker found us "stealing" grapes. We tried to explain that this vineyard belonged to my family, to no avail. Finally, he let us go (without grapes) without using the gun he had pointed at us. Meanwhile rumors spread that the border would soon close. So my oldest cousin decided again to leave. A cousin who lived in Slovakia returned from concentration camp to his home in eastern Slovakia and life would be better there. She tried to come back to Seredne to get us, but she was unable to cross the border. A few weeks later, messengers arrived with papers, showing that we were citizens of Slovakia and we were able to cross the border of Slovakia into freedom.

My Slovakian cousin was a mature business man, who gathered the surviving cousins. Later a home for orphaned Jewish girls opened in Kosice. There one of my cousins ~~was~~ <sup>AND I WERE</sup> accepted.

A year later, I met my husband. We got married and went to America. Nobody was waiting for us upon our arrival. At the harbor, we were stranded. After midnight a complete stranger, a lady, approached us. She found out who we were, took us (with our luggage) into her car and drove us to a hotel sponsored by Jewish organizations for surviving refugees. We stayed there for a few weeks—unable to find an apartment. As good fortune had it, one day a gentleman came into the hotel to look for any surviving relatives from Europe. He stopped by and asked us where we had come from, explaining that he was an "Old American" who himself had come from Europe. His name was Bernard Gottesman, and he was anxious to find out if, perhaps, some of his relatives were among these people. He could not believe it, but he had found me, a first cousin, Klara Gottesman Klein. With no hesitation, he took us to Cleveland, Ohio, where he lived. He found us an apartment, and a union job for my husband as a member of the International Typographical Union.

Above all, we never forget to say a daily prayer of thanks to the Almighty for the privilege of living in this blessed country—a country that gives us more freedom and opportunity than any other country in the whole wide world!